Infographics and Visually Appealing Slides

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ABSTRACT

Clients and employers are asking for infographics and visually appealing slides because they see infographics everywhere, and slides at conferences and meetings are looking different than in years past. They want graphical elements, short phrases, connections between ideas to be made clear, and to get to the point right away. Putting together these new deliverables means incorporating a few key elements and thinking differently about how you present data. The elements needed are *visual* (color coding, graphics, and icons), *content* (timeframes and timelines, statistics, and references), and *knowledge* (facts and deductions). Infographics come in different sizes: they can be an image of any size or shape, 1 or 2-page 8.5 by 11 sizes, or rolling infographics that are a standard screen width but any length (meant to be scrolled on a website). When creating visually appealing slides, use templates, icons, colors, and images to bring visual interest; put words into boxes, SmartArt, circles, shapes, charts, and graphics; and pare down the words and showcase certain words (often numbers or shorter phrases) with color, size, or space. Create infographics and visually appealing slides using sites or templates available from these sites and from PowerPoint Office 365 to make this process easier. Getting comfortable with these new visual formats might take some time, research, and exposure, but it can be a worthwhile addition to your skillset.

Whether your clients or employers call them infographics, ask for data visualization, or just complain that there are too many words or bullets, you have to figure out how to provide your data in a more visually appealing manner to keep up with changing ways of communicating. Sometimes client or employer complaints reflect a feeling that something is not right, but they do not know how to fix it. This may come out in many ways: *how can we make this look nicer? would this look better in a chart? could we have an image here?*

Even if they are not asking for it yet, it is coming. Infographics are everywhere, slides at conferences have a different look than in years past, and journals are now asking for graphical abstracts. People do not have the patience or attention span to read long paragraphs. They want short phrases on slides, connections between ideas to be made clear, and to get to the point right away.

The concepts behind infographics and visually appealing slides include elements of data visualization.

> **Data visualization** is the graphical representation of information and data. By using visual elements like charts, graphs, and maps, data visualization tools provide an accessible way to see and understand trends, outliers, and patterns in data.[1]

Charts and graphs are used to help people quickly see patterns in data, but sometimes photographs are used to make a slide catch the reader's eye or to show the point of the content. This article will discuss the elements of infographics and visually appealing slides, how to create them using sites and the tools and templates in PowerPoint, and where to look for inspiration when trying to make data and content more visually appealing.

This article's goal is to help those who do not have access to a graphic artist to design images, infographics, and more visually appealing slides. Those with access to a graphic artist should count themselves lucky, as many teams do not have these resources.

WHAT IS AN INFOGRAPHIC?

There are many different types of infographics, but they tend to have some common characteristics.

Infographics can be broken down into 3 easily digestible ideas as presented in the Figure: visual, content, and knowledge.[2] The *visual* come up again and again: color coding, graphics, and reference icons. Essential to any infographic is the *content*, which includes time frames and timelines, statistics, and references. And lastly are the facts and deductions that make up the
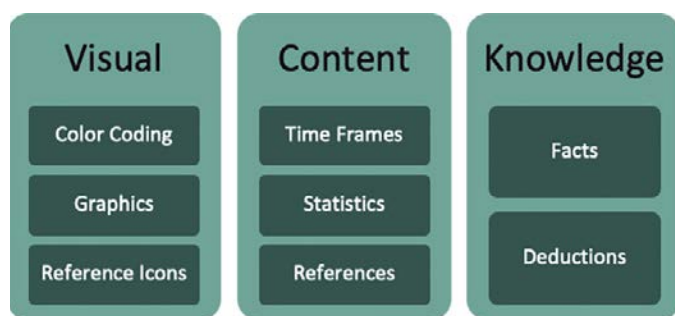
Figure. Elements of infographics.[2]

knowledge. In theory, you should be comfortable with the *content* and *knowledge* part of this perspective. You are probably just struggling with putting them into a new *visual* format, and this article will discuss this in more detail.

Infographics come in different sizes based on their use:
- The first size is the smallest, and it can be any size or shape. Infographic images are often used in slides or a document to provide visual interest or to make connections between ideas or data.
- The second size is a normal 8.5 by 11 document, either 1 page or 2 page. These 1 or 2-page infographics are used for handouts or in place of a document on a website.
- The last size is a rolling infographic, which can also be any size. Rolling infographics often appear as long images on a website, where they can be scrolled through to get to the different sections. They can cover a lot of information, but they must be accessed via a website and must be shared with a link to the site.

The Resources list has links to examples of infographics in each of these sizes.

WHAT IS A VISUALLY APPEALING SLIDE?

A visually appealing slide covers only one idea, and it does so in an interesting way.

According to *Slide:ology,*[3] "Effective slide design hinges on mastery of 3 things: arrangement, visual elements, and movement." Each of these 3 things has many elements within it.

Under *Arrangement,* Duarte lists contrast, flow, hierarchy, unity, proximity, and white space. She feels you must use each of these to tell the audience what has priority; the worst thing you can do is "put everything on one slide and assign them equal value."

Under *Visual Elements,* she lists background, color, text, and images. She believes that each of these "determines how

your slide elements will look" and that you must be consistent in their use.

Under *Movement,* she lists timing, pace, distance, direction, and eye flow, but much of this discussion centered around animation, and it was discouraged unless you really know what you are doing.

The goal is to keep the reader's interest by having a variety of thematically associated and relevant slides tell a story in a cohesive and interesting way. As a medical communicator, you may not always have the luxury of telling a really exciting story—maybe it is data about a study—but you can at least make the slides change a bit from each other without being so different they seem thrown together.

One of the most difficult parts of this is breaking away from our reliance on paragraphs, or paragraphs masquerading as bulleted lists, and learning to break data into more manageable/digestible chunks. If an idea needs a paragraph to be explained, it should be spoken, and it can be put into the notes to act as a script. In some cases, perhaps an important quote, a paragraph is fine, but again, it should NOT be the default. Similarly, slides with the standard bulleted lists should not be the default for a whole deck; use bulleted lists or numbered steps when they fit the purpose of a particular slide and try to expand how you present data on other slides.

Many times, breaking data into more digestible chunks requires more slides so that the speaker or the slide is only discussing one idea on each slide. If your deck is already too long, maybe you are just trying to do too much in one deck.

HOW DO YOU CREATE INFOGRAPHICS AND VISUALLY APPEALING SLIDES?
Sites
There are many sites that allow you to create infographics and visually appealing slides, as shown in the Table. All you have to do is pick a design and type information into it. For some projects, the site's design may fit your needs, with good colors, shapes, fonts, and the right spaces for the content you need to add.

All of the sites listed have infographic designs. Canva, Piktochart, and Visme also provide a variety of other graphic designs: slide sets, infographics, images, posts, and videos. Infogram and Venngage are more focused on the rolling infographic and are the most locked down with the free version of their services. Neither of these sites allows you to export the infographics you create on their site with the free version, and all you have is the version on their website with their logo or watermark when using the free version. Because most of your clients and employers will not want their infographics to be

Table. Sites for Creating Infographics and Visually Appealing Slides

Site	Types of Materials	Free Option			Paid Option (Individual)
		Able to Export?	Public Publication?	Watermark/ Branding?	
Canva	Infographics, slides	Yes	No	No	~$10/mo
Infogram	Infographics	No	Yes	Yes	~$19/mo
Piktochart	Infographics, slides	Yes	Yes	Yes	~$29/mo
Venngage	Infographics	No	Yes	Yes	~$49/mo
Visme	Infographics, slides	Yes	Yes	Yes	~$39/mo

branded/watermarked or published to the public site of one of these companies, you would have to upgrade to a paid version to be able to use it with clients and employers. Prices in the table reflect individual accounts (at time of publication), but upgrading to a corporate account would have the added benefit of sharing what you create with your team to allow collaboration.

Templates and Tools in PowerPoint
Templates
For those with the Office 365 version of PowerPoint and some skills (or those who are willing to learn), you can use PowerPoint and some of the infographic templates available to create different types of infographics.

Current versions of PowerPoint for PC and Mac have native templates for infographics. Some of these available files will be whole slide decks with infographic-like elements, others have an infographic element like a timeline or a chart, others have *images* (called icons in this article), and many are the type of 1-page or 2-page infographics discussed earlier (some are called *posters* and others are just named with the topic). Some have text that coincides with the topic; others have placeholder text (lorem ipsem). The added benefit of using PowerPoint is the ability to share files with coworkers and collaborate in a tool ubiquitous in modern offices.

You can also download PowerPoint infographic templates from different companies; here's a list of free infographic templates: https://graphicmama.com/blog/infographic-powerpoint-templates. Whether using the infographic templates provided within PowerPoint or from an outside provider, you can change colors, fonts, images, sizes, or anything else like any other PowerPoint file.

Tools
PowerPoint in Office 365 has many more options than older versions: the new Design Ideas function, more options in Smart Art, many more icons, and many more stock images. If you have an older version of PowerPoint, you will still have templates and SmartArt, but you may not have the same icons, any stock images, or the Design Ideas function.

If the stock images in PowerPoint are limited in your version or just do not have what you need, you can also find free stock images from websites such as Noun Project (https://thenounproject.com/), Pexels (https://www.pexels.com/), Pixabay (https://pixabay.com/), and Unsplash (https://unsplash.com/). Remember to always use them according to the site's terms and conditions and to give attribution whenever possible.

WHERE DO YOU GET INSPIRATION?
Where can you get design ideas, see what is in fashion (yes, it is constantly evolving), and see what good design looks like? Check out sites like Canva (https://www.canva.com/), Piktochart (https://piktochart.com/), and Visme (https://www.visme.co/), which all offer infographic and slide deck templates. Explore the PowerPoint options, especially the Design Ideas function, templates, and other tools available. Check out organizations like the Presentation Guild, which offers a certification for Presentation Specialists, and the Presentation Summit, which offers sessions and workshops from industry experts in presentation design.

Infographics and visually appealing slides are not going away anytime soon, so it is good to get familiar with the elements of infographics and how you use them. When creating or updating slides, incorporating elements of infographics will make you stand out.

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3. Duarte N. *Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations.* O'Reilly Media; 2008.

RESOURCES

- For information on how to create infographics and visually appealing slides using PowerPoint, see the How-to Handout .
- For an example of a handout infographic that discusses the common elements in infographics and visually appealing slides, see the Handout Infographic.
- For an example of a rolling infographic that provides resources, such as sites and stock images, see the Rolling Infographic.
- For an example of an image infographic that shows the three elements of infographics, see the Image Infographic.